CONFERENCE ON DISARMAMENT

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ENGLISH

FINAL RECORD OF THE NINE HUNDRED AND SECOND PLENARY MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Thursday, 23 May 2002, at 11.45 a.m.

President: Mr. Markku Reimaa (Finland)

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The PRESIDENT: I declare open the 902nd plenary meeting of the Conference on Disarmament.

At the outset, I would like to extend, on behalf of us all, a most warm welcome to the new Permanent Representative of Japan to the Conference on Disarmament, Ambassador Kuniko Inoguchi. Madam, you are most welcome and I would like to assure you of our full cooperation and support.

Ms. INOGUCHI (Japan): Mr. President, I would like to thank you and all the members of the Conference for your kind words of welcome. I have been a professor of political science for many years, and this is my first ambassadorial post. I appreciate the assurances of your help and extend my warmest regards to all of you.

The PRESIDENT: I have two names on my list of speakers, the representatives of South Africa and Belgium. I give the floor to the distinguished representative of South Africa.

Mr. MARKRAM (South Africa): Mr. President, I would like first to congratulate you on your assumption of the presidency of the Conference. As you have pointed out, this is your last operative day and, in this regard, we would like to express our appreciation for your enthusiasm and for your determination in trying to get us to substantive work. My delegation would, of course, have continued to lend you its full support and cooperation. I would also like to extend a warm welcome to the distinguished ambassadors of Australia and Japan.

It is obviously with deep regret that the Conference on Disarmament, which is defined as "the single multilateral disarmament negotiating forum of the international community" and which "has the primary role in substantive negotiations on priority questions of disarmament", has remained unable to agree on a programme of work. This is despite the fact that there is almost unanimous support in the Conference for some mechanism to deal with the issues about which we have been deliberating over the last few years. This is despite the fact that there is general agreement that nuclear disarmament, the prevention of an arms race in outer space and banning the production of fissile materials are concerns of the entire international community and that United Nations General Assembly resolutions call on us to deal with these issues.

I believe that it is incumbent upon me to make the point to those delegations who continue to refuse to recognize the legitimate concerns of other States, while insisting that we should respect and show understanding for theirs, that continued intransigence is likely to exacerbate and not to improve the situation.

South Africa would urge the delegations involved to reconsider again their positions, because proposals over the last months and those presently under discussion reflect a very moderate approach, far less than our own national positions and those of other delegations in this room.

(Mr. Markram, South Africa)

I did not speak at the informals before this, but it should be clear from my statement that we can support the current proposal, as we could the proposals of many of the previous presidents of the Conference.

The prime reason for me asking for the floor today is to introduce a working paper on the possible scope and requirements of a fissile material treaty. We have taken the floor on earlier occasions to elaborate on South Africa's views on this issue, but we hope that, by introducing this paper, we can add a little more constructive focus to an issue that has been long overdue for negotiation in this body. This would hopefully also complement the noteworthy efforts, particularly by the Netherlands, Japanese and Australian delegations in Geneva, to sustain and promote interest in negotiating a fissile material treaty.

The South African working paper attempts to deal with some of the most vexing issues that negotiations on a fissile material treaty present. South Africa has, by virtue of its own unique historical experience with the destruction of a limited nuclear weapons programme and the completeness investigation undertaken by the International Atomic Energy Agency, acquired some practical insights that may be of some benefit to member States. This is particularly the case regarding stocks, where we underline the difficulties associated with this issue and offer what we consider to be a practical, achievable and effective manner of dealing with the issue in a way that fulfils nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation objectives. I would like to request that this working paper be circulated as an official document of the Conference.

The PRESIDENT: I thank the distinguished representative of South Africa for his statement, and I give the floor to the next speaker on my list, the distinguished Ambassador of Belgium.

Mr. LINT (Belgium) (translated from French): Mr. President, I would like, at the outset, to congratulate you on your accession to the post of President of the Conference on Disarmament and to commend you on the excellent work which you have accomplished. Please be assured that you may count on the full cooperation of my delegation.

I would also like to take this opportunity to welcome our new colleagues from Australia and Japan.

My congratulations also go to the Democratic Republic of the Congo, which, on 2 May 2002, acceded to the Convention on the Prohibition of Anti-Personnel Mines and thereby became the 123rd State to have ratified or acceded to the Convention.

There are other encouraging signs which we might note, pointing to the universalization of the Treaty. First, Cameroon is shortly to deposit its instruments of ratification; second, one of the first actions to be performed by East Timor, as a new independent State, will be to accede to the Convention; third, the interim Government of Afghanistan has announced its intention of acceding to the Convention and comparable positive signals are reaching us from other countries

(Mr. Lint, Belgium)

in all the continents; and, fourth, we also congratulate the Greek Parliament on its ratification in March 2002 and express the hope that the Turkish Parliament will be able to follow suit in the near future, as we have been informed in this forum by our Turkish colleague.

In this way, the States parties have set in motion a dynamic process leading towards universal adherence to and respect for the Convention. The next stage in this process will be the intersessional week, to be held at the Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining, from Monday 27 May to Friday 31 May 2002. I would like to invite you all to take part in this event.

The PRESIDENT: I thank the distinguished representative of Belgium for his statement. For the moment that concludes the list of speakers for our plenary today. Does any other delegation wish to take the floor? If not, before proceeding to my concluding remarks, I would like to give the floor briefly to the distinguished Ambassador of Sri Lanka for an announcement.

Mr. KARIYAWASAM (Sri Lanka): I would still want to continue, after the plenary is over, my informal consultations. I would also like to announce that, after the conclusion of today's informal consultations, I will have another round of consultations next Thursday.

The PRESIDENT: I would now like to conclude the presidency of Finland with the following short remarks.

Finland has now served for the first time as President of the Conference on Disarmament. It has been a great honour, and in many ways, a rewarding experience. We thank you, our team, both here and in Helsinki, for all your support, cooperation, encouragement, useful advice and professional assistance.

The main purpose of our efforts was to see if we could make a difference to past years in the light of the events of 11 September 2001. We thought that we had a common concern and a feeling of urgency for the sake of the Conference on Disarmament, its usefulness and credibility. We still think that these concerns are valid today. In addition to that, we saw that the continuing high-level bilateral dialogue was providing welcome impetus to our endeavours. We are today even more convinced that multilateral efforts and dialogue in the Conference on Disarmament are needed to strengthen the common understanding of where we are and where we are going.

We put forward some specific ideas in our letter on 28 March 2002 to all of you, and we have conducted extensive consultations on that basis. We recognize that those formulations were not final or ideal but in any case they served to engage us in dialogue and on a more focused and detailed basis. We were not asking the informal regional groups to take a stand on that. It was rather our preference that every individual delegation should carefully consider these suggestions. We have repeatedly said that every chair in this hall is the most responsible one in our endeavours. The initiation of work in the Conference on Disarmament this year is the paramount and common challenge. It is obvious that there are different - even very different - expectations as to the nature and intensity of our deliberations after a long time of inactivity. We understand that. For those reasons, we were ready to listen, and I think that the

(The President)

informal session was most useful. We listened to your comments, suggestions, and you see the latest version and our thinking in a draft decision which a representative of the secretariat is distributing to you as I speak.

In closing, let me remind you of what my Minister has pointed out: "New threats to international security make this year different from the previous year. The opening of a dialogue in the Conference on Disarmament would allow us to take a fresh look at the issues which the international community considers important, to meet the challenges of non-proliferation and disarmament in a new situation, and to continue shaping a common understanding of a safer world."

Let me now thank the previous presidents for this year, our colleagues from Egypt and Ethiopia, for their most valuable and courageous preparations for the Finnish presidency. Thank you all for your cooperation and help. To the interpreters: I did not have a text to copy for you, but I hope that my English speed is so slow that you have been able to keep pace with me anyway. I thank the representatives of the secretariat for their efficient assistance, and it remains to me to wish the next President, our esteemed friend and good colleague, Ambassador de La Fortelle, and his team all the best when they take over the gavel next week.

Ladies and gentlemen, the next plenary meeting will take place on Thursday, 30 May 2002, at 10 a.m. in this room.

The meeting rose at noon.